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An Archaeology of Self

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An Archaeology of Self

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree
of Master of Fine Art Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Abstract

The title of this dissertation is *An Archaeology of Self*. The first two chapters explore the historical and theoretical basis that has informed my creative work. It is predominantly concerned with artists who engage with the everyday in their art-making. The three main ideas elaborated upon in the body of the text are; the notion of mark making and trace as able to invoke the corporeal presence of the artists; the inclusion of quotidian objects and routines as subject matter within art that recontextualises them as worthy of attention; and the extent to which the representation or use of material objects, traces and leavings can retain significant meaning. The latter is explored in reference to artists who use an archaeological methodology in their work.

An underlying theme in both practical and theoretical research is the concept of indexical trace that invokes the presence of its referent while paradoxically signalling its absence.

The concluding chapters deal with my methodology and the processes of collection used in arriving at the works presented for examination. These works, which have been arrived at through indexical art-making processes, are each described and contextualised.

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Introduction

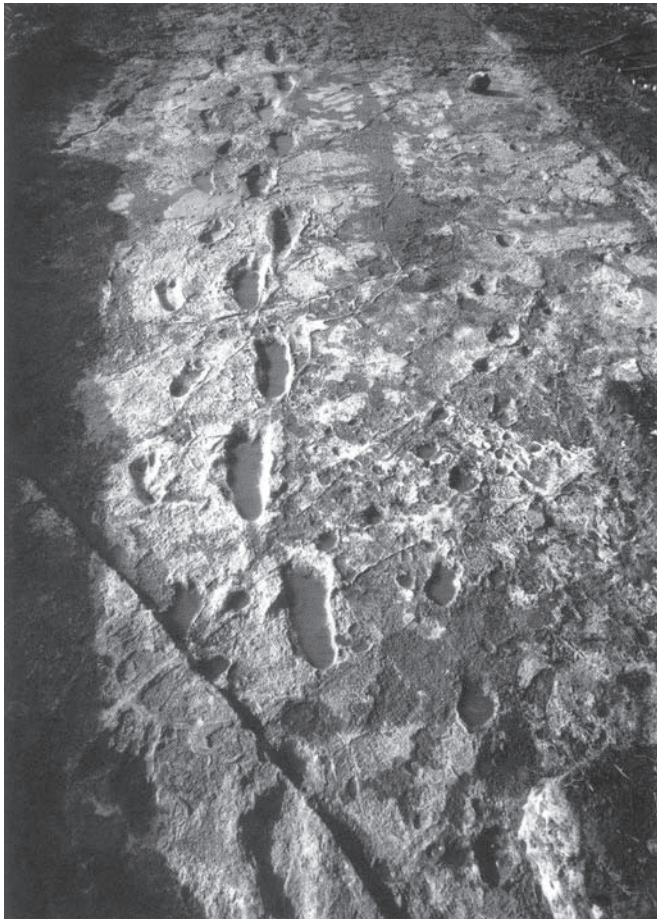


Figure 1: *Imprints left in ash at Laetoli, Tanzania, circa 3.6 million years ago.*

The global landscape is marked by the vestiges of a number of former cultures, societies and peoples. Most often these traces lie abandoned and in ruin. Sometimes they have been fenced off, partly restored and marketed as tourist attractions. One thinks here of the Great Wall of China, the Parthenon in Athens and Stonehenge in England. For some period in the history of these three examples, they too have lain abandoned and pillaged for building material. Their origin, significance and purpose seemingly forgotten.

In my own case I was intrigued to read about the discovery of the 'Laetoli footprints' (Figure 1). These 'marks' in volcanic ash were left by our ancestors some 3.6 million years ago. In fact, I was more than intrigued, I was fascinated. Not only have these traces survived the passage of time, they have also survived archaeologist's attempts to preserve them. Mary Leakey discovered the site in 1974, and apparently returned in 1978 to rebury it. This caused tree roots to take hold and some of the ancient footprints were disturbed. Heinz R  ther of

the University of Cape Town used photogrammetry to create a three-dimensional model of the footprints. These now exist, in digital format, at UCT.

This re-presentation of physical movement—going to a waterhole in the case of our *Australopithecus aferensis* ancestors, or going to the shops, in my case, lies at the heart of my project—an archaeology of the everyday.

The title of this dissertation, *An Archaeology of Self*, refers to my method of collecting the traces of everyday existence that I leave behind. My creative work is an attempt to provide materiality to the often ephemeral detritus, actions and objects that bear evidence to daily routine and habit.

This study is primarily concerned with artists who engage with the everyday in their art making. I have limited the focus to the identification of aspects that have informed my body of work. The following interrelated aspects can be identified.

I intend my body of work to be read as evidence of my actions and interactions within the world. The notion of gestural mark making that is able to

invoke the corporeal presence of the artists within the work has been influential to my thinking. Within my creative work I have extended this notion to include the marks that I leave on my environment. However, historical precedents of abstract artists have contributed to my understanding of artwork that can be read as the aftermath of an event. With regards to my creative work my interest does not lie in an artistic event, but rather a routine event that forms part of an everyday occurrence.

The idea that my everyday actions can be reframed and solidified within my art practice is an important element of my work. My creative work is based on the idea that the 'background noise' of everyday life can be reframed as art by isolating elements of everyday life and transfiguring them as art. Therefore I identify with artwork that includes quotidian objects and routines as subject matter and show them to be worthy of attention.

A further influence is the use of detritus, objects and documents to stand in for the self. Artefacts can retain meaning through coming into contact with the human body. Artists often intentionally use devices to bring these connections to the

fore. Another important element explored relates to biographical events and memories that are dispersed across material objects. I ask whether these traces and leavings can retain significant meaning. Walter Benjamin said that 'to live means to leave traces' (1979: 155). In our consumer culture the nature of these traces will often be found in the form of a material record. Artists often select objects that somehow refer to a personal narrative. In a similar way to the museum artefact, these art objects serve as evidence of existence.

The underlying thread in the study is the way in which indexical trace invokes presence, but paradoxically stresses absence. Rosalind Krauss's reinterpretation of the indexical sign in *Notes on the Index* (1977) has greatly informed my understanding of this issue.

The first chapter focuses on historical precedents of the convergence of art and life. Firstly, I examine the role that the questioning of artworks as autonomous objects have played in opening up art to include elements of the everyday. I relate this to post-war abstract work and the use of gestural mark making as trace of bodily actions.

The second part of this chapter considers how the work of Robert Rauschenberg extended the reference between gestural mark making and the body to include elements of the everyday environment. Finally, I look at artists who drew attention to everyday modes of experience but also brought the quotidian object to the forefront.

The second chapter investigates artists, who consider, as well as question, the ability of material objects, trace and leavings to testify to the biographical existence of their subject matter. I argue that their art practices engage with a kind of artistic archaeology. The use of an archaeological methodology is firstly examined through a discussion of the creation of a personal narrative as told by the objects of Christian Boltanski. Secondly, I look to the way in which artists reframe everyday objects as significant by emphasising the trace that an individual has left on it. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the use of maps within art, where the maps can be read as artefacts of human behaviour.

The third chapter of this study explicates my practical methodology through an exploration

of my processes of selecting and collecting the everyday, as well as how the indexical nature of my art objects are further built on by my choice of indexical art processes.

The fourth chapter provides a list of works submitted for examination. A short description and explanation contextualises each work within the wider concerns of the study.

University of Cape Town

Chapter 1: The convergence of art and life

The following chapter provides historical references to visual art discourses that played an important role in the convergence of art and life. The connecting thread is the investigation of artists who engage with the everyday as primary mode in their art making. The trajectory can arguably be traced to the Duchampian notion that objects from everyday life and consumer culture can be recast as art objects simply by the artists' act of labelling them as such. What followed was an explosion of art processes that made reference to the everyday by different means and for different purposes. The scale of a study of all of these processes would be immense; therefore I limit this chapter to a discussion of artists who have informed my creative work.

1.1. Mark making as trace

In the aftermath of World War II one of the dominant tendencies within American art was abstraction, either geometrical or some form of

Abstract Expressionism. Abstract Expressionism is a loose term used to describe an idea rather than a style, with its essence the spontaneous assertion of the individual through processes of automation borrowed from Surrealism. The term was originally used to describe the paintings of Kandinsky, and later the critic Robert Coates applied it to De Kooning, Pollock and their followers. Rosenberg coined the phrase 'Action painting' to describe artists who favoured the process above the product. The neutral term 'New York School' has also been used to describe American painting throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

Jackson Pollock is well known for his gestural paintings in which he dripped, spattered and threw paint onto canvasses that he placed on the floor. A dominant model for the interpretation of Abstract Expressionism, the viewpoint of the artist as 'an existential creator', was propagated by critic Harold Rosenberg (Foster, 2002: 40).

¹ Charles Sanders Peirce defines the index by its physical material connection to the object. In his text *Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs*, Peirce gives as example a low barometer with a moist air as an index for rain and a weathercock as an index for wind (Peirce, 1955: 109–110).

In her two texts *Notes on the Index* Rosalind Krauss revises the conventional indexical operation. Krauss proposes the concept of 'presence [that is] fixed indexically' (Krauss, 1977a: 80). She states that an index is 'produced by a physical cause, the trace, the impression, the clue, [and] are vestiges of that cause which is itself no longer present in the given sign (Krauss, 1977b: 65). Thus the index refers to a presence that is paradoxically not present. Index is an operation of presence - an operation that works to imprint presence in its absence (Johung, 2006: 43–44).

Rosenberg became an advocate for artists such as DeKooning and Kline. Today his term Action painting is used freely in association with Pollock's work.

In *The American Action Painters* (first published in 1952), Rosenberg described the 'new American painting' as an event, the canvas as an 'arena in which to act' and the artist as being able to 'get inside the canvas'. He argues that a painting that is an event is inseparable from the biography of the artist, breaking down the distinction between art and life. The motive for the extinguishing of the object (in art) is thus supposed to have a mirror function in which the mark signals the presence of the maker (Rosenberg, 1959: 2–3).

Pollock's drip paintings are particularly suggestive of the movements with which they were made. Furthermore, because they were made on the floor, they often contain everyday things such as cigarette butts and studio debris.

A number of writers see Pollock's work as evidence of aggressive movements, his mark making as violent and suggestive of bodily

spillage (Krauss, Humphrey, and Rugoff). David Humphrey noted that 'Pollock treated his medium as analogically connected to his body and to the unconscious as he understood it. The loose unstretched canvas that he worked on the floor became a stained sheet onto which Pollock leaked himself' (Humphrey, 1990: 105).

Pollock's mark making is often interpreted as serving an indexical function. Indexical trace, residue, or in this case mark making, can be understood through its relationship to its referent. Where trace is present, the referent will paradoxically be absent. This notion of an indexical sign that imprints presence through absence¹ is exemplified by John Baldessari's *White Shape* (Figure 2) in which he refashions a famous documentary photograph of Pollock performing for the camera. He cuts Pollock out of the photograph, with only the negative silhouette remaining. As such Rosenberg's claim of the artists as being 'inside the canvas' is recontextualised. Rather the painting is seen as evidence of the aftermath of an event, rather than the event itself.

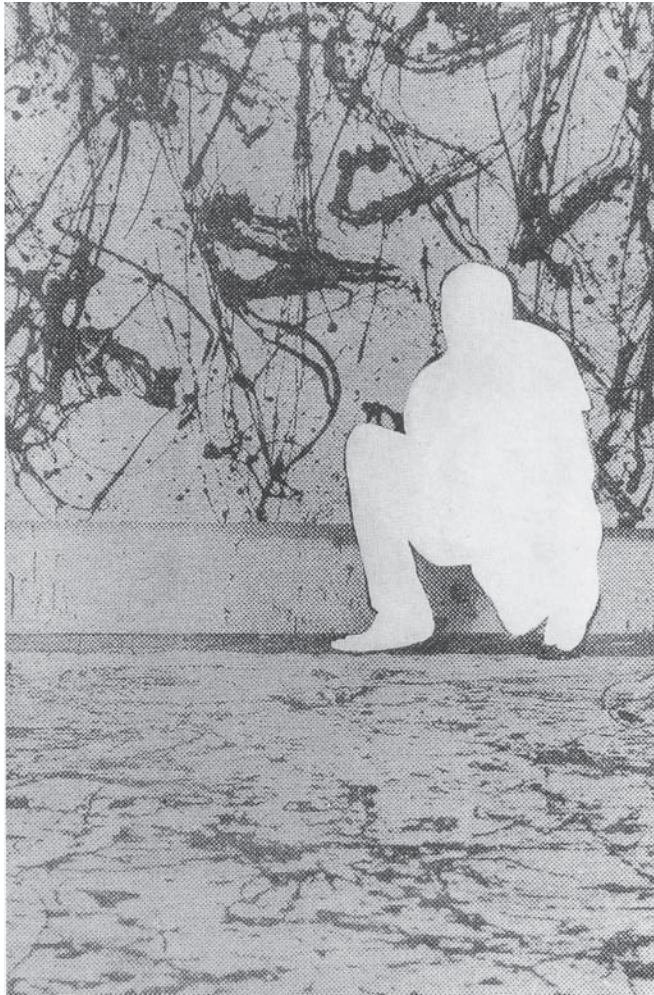


Figure 2: John Baldessari, *White Shape*, 1984. Black and white photograph with acrylic, mounted on board, 121.9 x 73.7 cm.

The picture plane as an arena of evidence that can be read through indexical trace marks a shift in Modernism. This is a reading which contradicts the formalist model for interpretation as propagated by Clement Greenberg. Greenberg advocated the purification of all art forms by sacrificing any subject matter except those that are dictated by the material qualities of the medium. He argues in favour of a Modernist art object that refers to nothing outside of itself. An understanding of Pollock's paintings as referring to bodily presence (through absence), by being an aftermath of bodily gesture, signals the move away from the autonomous art object. It hints at future art movements that focus on artworks that bear imprints of prior activities (Rugoff, 1997: 66).

In the mid 1950s, Cy Twombly took the drip and the splatter of the Action painters and transformed them into scratches, markings and lines that read like a kind of graffiti. In Twombly's *Olympia* (Figure 3) scribbles and scratches are visible through, or on layers of paint. This work has the appearance of a palimpsest in which some words and marks are legible and some half-legible.

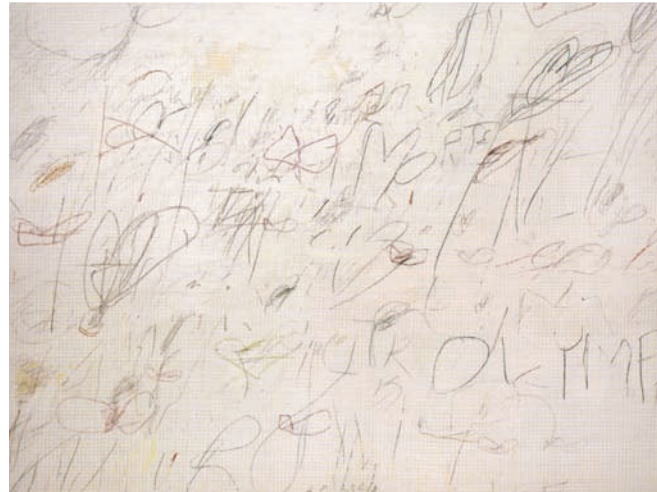


Figure 3: Cy Twombly, *Olympia*, 1957. Oil-based house paint, wax crayon, coloured pencil, and lead pencil on canvas, 200 x 264.5 cm.

The surface of the work can thus be likened to an excavation where meaning is slowly uncovered through investigating layer by layer (Darwent, 2008: np).

Twombly's work reminds us of graffiti that one might find on the back of a public toilet door, or the doodles left on a notepad next to the telephone. Graffiti, according to Krauss, turns the present tense of a performance into the past

tense of the index, signalling to future readers that you *were* present, that you *were* there (Krauss, 2010: 200–201).

The massive scale of Twombly's *The Age of Alexander* (1959–1960) reminds us that a work that measures approximately 3.5 x 5 meters could not have been done without Twombly using his whole body. Although it references graffiti and doodles it is not a work that could have been made in a moment. Twombly succeeds in turning the performance of the inconsequential into something monumental.

A reading of Twombly's work as a kind of writing process also brings to mind Roland Barthes's interpretation of writing as negotiating the return of the body as neither 'too present' nor 'too absent'. Accordingly, writing signals the return of the body as present *and* absent, indexically through the operation of writing (Barthes, 1985: 6). As such, Twombly's work also draws into question the utopian vision of Rosenberg's 'mirror art',² the ability of an art work to stand in for the artist to become a mark of presence. The critique of the utopian vision of Action

² As explained in *The American Action Painters*, the motive for the extinguishing of the object (in art) is supposed to have a mirror function in which the mark signals the presence of the maker (Rosenberg, 1959: 2–3).



Figure 4 (left): Lucio Fontana, *Concetto Spaziale, Attesa* (Spatial Concept, Wait), 1960. Hydropainting on canvas, 116 x 89 cm.

Figure 5 (right): Shozo Shimamoto, *Work: Holes*, 1950.

painters extends to the painter Lucio Fontana, who sliced, punctured and scratched into, and through the canvas. Both Pollock's and Fontana's work bear a resemblance in their casual reference to trace. However, the intentions of the artists differ significantly. Where the direct corporeal intervention was understood to amplify and express the individuality of the artist through gesture in

the work of Pollock and other Action painters, Fontana reduces the said gesture to something that can be likened to a mechanical action.

The mechanisation of the gestural mark undermines the rhetoric of individuality present in the paintings of The Informel.³ At the same time, despite its minimalist appearance and total elimination of the painterly mark, Fontana's *Cut paintings* (Figure 4) still have an element of corporeal engagement.

Fontana exposes the 'reality' of the painting's objecthood by revealing the gallery wall behind the canvas. Alternatively, the elongated cuts with their tapered edges have the potential to suggest the artist's body. Rosalind Krauss's description of the index in terms of violence seems particularly relevant here:

For if to make a mark is already to leave one's mark, it is already to allow the outside of an event to invade its inside; it cannot be conceived without the 'nonpresence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present' ... the index's violence is not, then, just a consequence of its being the residue of a crime, but is instead a condition of the structure of the marker's having been cut away from himself; it is as though he had gone up to a mirror to witness his

³ Like the Abstract Expressionists, the Italian Informel painters advocated the creative, autonomous process as an integral part of the work.

own appearing and had smashed the mirror instead. Had thereby voided his own presence, leaving only his mark (Krauss, 1993: 260).

The theme of the pictorial surface as wounded also appears in Shozo Shimamoto's work. Shimamoto was part of the Japanese Gutai Art Association and was exposed to Abstract Expressionism and, in particular Jackson Pollock's work. Gutai is often characterised by the violent gestures that formed part of both the making and the content of the art. According to Munroe, the material process was conceived of as a 'wilful rite of destruction to create something new' (Munroe, 1945: 90).

Shimamoto's work exemplifies the use of the destructive gesture to create artworks. From 1949–1952 Shimamoto produced a series of works called *Work: Holes* (Figure 5). He constructed delicate paper surfaces by gluing layer after layer of newspaper onto one another. He then covered the newspaper with oil-based house paint. He would start drawing a series of random pencil markings and scratchings. Eventually the pencil would break through the surface of the paper. Shimamoto followed the accidental puncture

marks with deliberate stabbings. (Munroe, 1945: 87).

1.2. Absorbing the environment

In the mid to late 1950s Robert Rauschenberg created a series of works which he called the 'Combines'. In these works Rauschenberg reinvented collage by combining painting, collage and transfers, as well as two- and three dimensional found objects. In an early Combine painting entitled *Charlene* (Figure 6); the assemblage elements include oil paint, charcoal, paper, fabric, newspaper, wood, plastic, mirror, metal and an electrical bulb. He combined all of these elements in four panels mounted on wood. Just off centre to the right he stretched a paint-splattered sweatshirt onto the canvas.

The smears and drips of paint, running from the sweatshirt downwards, reminds the viewer of the gestural mark of Pollock that alludes to human presence. The shirt itself is so tightly stretched onto the canvas that it confronts one with the absence of a human body. Underneath the shirt



Figure 6: Robert Rauschenberg, *Charlene*, 1954. Mixed media, 226 x 284 x 8.9 cm.

one can see the only figurative representation in the form of portraits. On the right a distorted mirror confronts the viewer with their own skewed image. Leo Steinberg states that Rauschenberg's work functions as a 'flatbed picture plane'. Steinberg argues that the picture plane now began tilting imaginatively in the viewer's mind until the relationship of the viewer no longer depends on the traditional head to toe correspondence. Rather, it alludes to any hard-top surface such as a table,

studio floor, charts or bulletin boards on which information can be scattered, entered or imprinted. The surface thus becomes a receptor of any and all kinds of information (Steinberg, 2000: 33).

Rauschenberg's work is often referred to as a catalogue of the body. The bodily traces that his Combines refer to are different from the sublimated expressionist marks of the Action painters. They speak of the materiality (or corporeality) of the surface itself. The assemblage of the painted ground and found object combines into a palimpsestual skin (Bader, 2007).

The attempt to connect the artist's body to their artwork is also evident in Rauschenberg's 1951–3 *Black Paintings* as well as *Bed*. The 'shit brown and black' paint and linen soiled with graphite scribbles and dripped paint serves an indexical function. Rauschenberg also applied paint directly with his hands and hand-pressed collage images into glue. Helen Molesworth argues that they are 'an attempt to know the interior through the autoerotic pleasures of shit [and] are the horror of the body exploded, dispersed, and flowing

over the surfaces of everything' (1993: 80).

The interpretation of Rauschenberg's works as receptors for information takes on a literal meaning in his *White Paintings* (Figure 7). At John Cage's event, *Theatre Piece No#1*⁴, the *White Paintings* were suspended over the heads of the audience while the performance took place beneath them (Kaizen, 2003: 90).

Cage noted that, in the absence of any painterly mark, the *White Paintings* showed the changing play of light and shadow and even the presence of dust.⁵ Rauschenberg himself described the paintings as '...hypersensitive ... So that one could look at them and almost see how many people were in the room by the shadows cast, or what time of day it was' (Rauschenberg in Tomkins, 1980: 71). Through the reflective nature of the paintings the actions of the audience members, as well as the performances that took place underneath them, were cast back onto the participants themselves. In this manner both the art event and the ordinary movement of the spectator shared the same pictorial surface.

Kaprow attributed the dissolving of the boundaries of art and the incorporation of real space, to

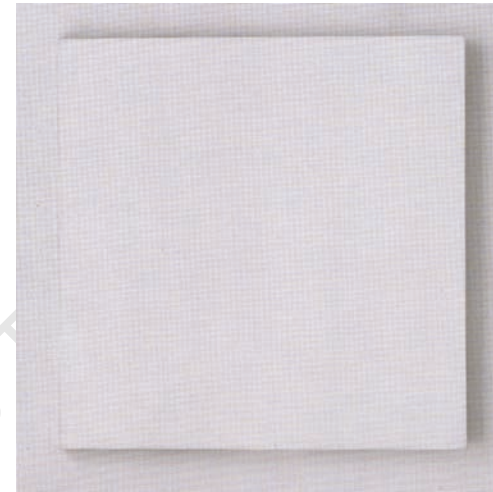


Figure 7: Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 121.9 cm.

the evolution of collage and assemblage. He stated that after paper and other found objects were introduced, it was only a matter of time before anything, including real space, would be allowed. He argued that this allowed the viewer to be immersed and inscribed within the work of art and traced this principle back to Pollock.

In *The Legacy of Jackson Pollock*, written shortly after Pollock's death in 1956, Kaprow extends Rosenberg's claim that the work of the Abstract

4 A crucial development in the trajectory of art processes that attempted to blur the boundary between art processes and everyday life were the early Happenings of the late 1950s and early 1960s. *Theatre Piece No#1* was such an event. My interest in the artists and events of the early Happenings and their influences lies in the development of the notion that a work of art can become a receptacle to be filled with the everyday. I am also concerned with the manner in which that which normally goes unnoticed, specifically in relation to the everyday, is reframed as an area of interest.

Expressionists collapsed art and life. 'The new painting', Rosenberg wrote, 'has broken down every distinction between art and life' (Rosenberg, 1959: 3). For Rosenberg this refers to the collapse of the distinction between the work of art and the maker. The art work becomes biographical and the result of a specific ego struggling with material processes. Kaprow however, interprets Rosenberg's concepts of 'event' and 'gesture' literally. Pollock's unboundedness, for him, suggests an expansion of painting into the space of viewing and into everyday life (Kaizen, 2003: 83). He wrote that 'we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, our bodies, clothes, rooms, if need be, the vastness of Forty-Second Street.' He continued by saying that in the future, all of life would be open to young artists. 'They will discover out of ordinary things the meaning of ordinariness. They will not try to make them extraordinary but will only state their real meaning. But out of nothing they will devise the extraordinary and then maybe nothingness as well.' (Kaprow, 1958: 8–9).

1.3. The quotidian object and the body

The art of the 1960s can be divided into two main concerns. On the one hand we see a critique of the separation between high art and popular culture and the image of the artist as a visionary. On the other hand are artists who are concerned with an attempt to cross the boundary between art and life by trying to make art processes and products indistinguishable from activities and objects of the quotidian. Fluxus artists were particularly active in this pursuit, with one of their main aims to bring art and life together. I am particularly interested in Fluxusworks, not for the way in which they produced work, but rather for their chosen subject matter.

Fluxus artists emphasised performance and play and aimed to bring art and life together. Their intention was the collapse of the traditional division between mediums and the undermining of artistic authority through collaboration and audience participation. The methodology of Fluxus incorporates the same sort of language that was appropriate to the time in the form of Pop Art and the early Happenings. The chance operations of Dada, as well as Duchamp's use

5 Allan Kaprow reacted to Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* in a similar fashion. He was unsure of what to make of them until he noticed that the surface of the painting became a receptacle for the movement of his body. He said that 'I was walking back and forth, not knowing how I should take these things...and then I saw my shadows across the painting - moving' (Kaprow in Marter, 1999: 132).

of the readymade, which implied that objects taken from daily life could be reframed as art by the artist's act of designating them as such, were important precedents to Fluxus activities.

An important theme in the work of Piero Manzoni is the commodification of art as well as the questioning of the nature and value of art. His works bridge two approaches: one resides in the material, especially in the body and its substances, and the other trades with unverifiable things and actions in a realm that negotiates a space somewhere between art and life (Silk, 1993: 68).

A number of Manzoni's works cite organic functions of the artists body. In *Body of Air* Manzoni succeeds in lending the ethereal process of breathing some material form. A wooden case holding a balloon, a mouthpiece, a tripod and instructions invites the purchaser to blow up the balloon and place it on its stand. On request Manzoni, or any other artist, would inflate it for them. In this case the price of the work would increase and the name would change to *Artist's Breath* (Figure 8). As in Fluxus Happenings, the collaboration of the spectator is



Figure 8 (left): Piero Manzoni, *Artist's Breath*, 1960. Balloon, wood base, 18 x 18 cm.

Figure 9 (right): Piero Manzoni, *Merda d'artista*, No 176, 1961. Tin can and printed paper, 4.8 x ø 6cm.

essential for the functioning of the work. Manzoni provides anyone with the opportunity to participate in the 'artist-god myth, imparting life to art through his or her breath' (Silk, 1993: 72), but immediately destabilises his effort by charging 250 lire⁶ more for the honour of possessing a balloon filled with the 'real' artists breath.

Manzoni commented that 'When I blow up the balloon, I am breathing my soul into an object that becomes eternal' (Manzoni in Celant 1998: 144). We know that this is in fact, not true. The balloons

6 The lira (plural lire) was the currency of Italy between 1861 and 2002.

did deflate and in the process became something that can be likened to a relic of the immaterial bodily excretion of breath (Fer, 2004: 43). In a self-conscious manner these works also become a parody of Pollock's process, they function as a trace of the actions performed to make them.

Manzoni again utilised the indexical trace in the 1960 event *The consumption of dynamic art by the art-devouring public*. For this event Manzoni boiled 70 eggs which he 'signed' with his thumbprint. After eating a number of them himself he offered the rest to the art audience to consume. 'The audience enjoyed direct contact with these works' he said, 'swallowing an entire exhibition in seventy minutes.' (Manzoni in Thompson, 1998: 41). This work makes reference to cycles of consumption that result in waste; it breaks down the art/life distinction as well as emphasising the idea that art is a commodity to be consumed.⁷ Through the act of 'signing' and offering the hardboiled artworks to be consumed, the viewer and the art is fused through an act of destruction. The only remaining traces of the works might have been found in another form of indexical trace, namely the excrement

of the 'art devouring public'. (Silk, 1993: 69–70).

Manzoni took these ideas to the extreme in *Merda d'artista* (Artist's Shit) (Figure 9) in which he filled 90 cans with his own excrement. The lid of each can is printed with the words 'Produced by' followed by his signature. The label reads 'Artist's Shit', contents 30grams net, freshly preserved, produced and tinned in May 1961. Each can was offered as if it were a product to be launched onto the consumer market with each can priced according to its weight in gold.⁸ These works resemble mass production while also playing on the concealment of the content by its packaging. As such his body becomes an active instrument for producing signs and traces to be used within art.

In these works we are always acutely aware of Manzoni's body, although it is never present. He frames himself as a consumable to be used up by the art public. His references to eating, shitting and breathing, all processes that are necessary for living, make us intensely aware of the transitory nature of the human body. Other Fluxus strategies included activities such as

7 John Cage spoke of the idea of consuming art by stating that 'We should be able to consume it [art] in relation to the other things in our lives which we consume (Cage quoted by Kostelanetz, 1965: 54).

8 This work recalls Duchamp's formula that equates art with shit and shit with art.

performances of music, theatrical gestures, and movements and scores of action that are based on an individual's everyday experience. The main focus here would be the interaction of human bodies with objects as well as actions in everyday life.

A Fluxus score was a series of instructions which, when followed, would result in a performance. Scores were mainly based on habitual actions, for instance George Brecht's score which consisted of turning a light on and off; Georges Maciunas's led to the raising and lowering of a hat or umbrella; Ay-O' cleaned his teeth; and Alison Knowles made a salad and read the newspaper.⁹ The score for Knowles' *Shoes of Your Choice* was presented as:

Proposition #6¹⁰

A member of the audience is invited to come forward to a microphone if one is available and describe a pair of shoes, the one he is wearing or another pair. He is encouraged to tell where he got them, the size, colour, why he likes them, etc. (Knowles, 1962).

When this score was performed at a concert in London in 1962, the British Pop artist Richard Hamilton reacted to the invitation. He embarked on a long and witty description of everything from

the size of the heel to a justification for his choice of purchase (Robinson, 2004: 99). Like many of the Fluxus scores, *Shoes of Your Choice* brings the use of the quotidian object into the art arena.

Knowles' later work was no longer exclusively score based. She started using objects, though still left the work open to the interaction of the subject who could often look, touch and interact with it. *The Big Book* (Figure 10) is a walkthrough environment that existed out of seven eight by four foot 'pages' that was organised around a spine. The spectator had to climb through holes and navigate a ladder to discover all elements of the installation based on accounts of rituals of everyday life. Knowles drew inspiration out of her own experience of downtown loft living. The elements on the 'pages' included Canal Street crockery, a Chinatown tea kettle, makeshift heating coils for cooking, a toilet and a telephone. *The Big Book* drew attention to everyday modes of experience that usually go unnoticed such as cooking, eating and sleeping by making them the subject of the 'readers' experience (Robinson, 2004: 104–105). With an experience of *The Big*

9 All of these scores were reproduced in Ken Friedman's *The Fluxus Performance Workbook*.

10 Knowles' use of the word 'proposition' hints at the influence of the Cagean compositional devices of indeterminate performance and chance operations.

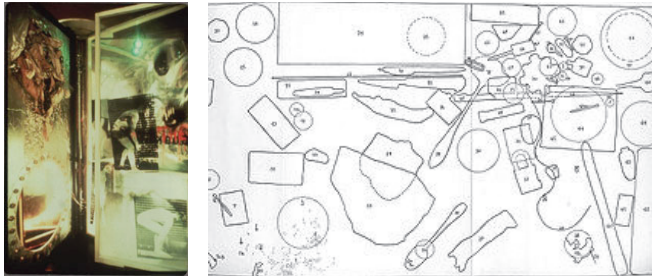


Figure 10 (left): Alison Knowles, *The Big Book*, 1967.

Figure 11 (right): Daniel Spoerri, Portion of map for *Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, 1962.

Book, argues William Wilson in a 1968 review, 'the necessary routines of life that must be repeated everyday have the feeling of a ritual, not because it is necessary to do them but because it is *possible* to do them, everyday.' (Wilson, 1968: 103).

Objects of everyday living also come to the foreground in the work of Daniel Spoerri.¹¹ His work often contains autobiographical reflections, told through a narrative with objects. In *Anecdoted Topography of Chance* (Figure 11), Spoerri traced objects that were scattered on his studio table onto a map. He outlined the objects and numbered

each. He added an 'anecdote' to each object which described it, recalled the situation under which it was purchased, the uses to which it had been put as well as any other associations that it recalled. When friends Emmett Williams and Dieter Roth translated the *Anecdoted Topography of Chance* they added their own annotations.

In relation to *No. 46a, Burnt match in ashtray* Roth wrote that 'these images, the images of discarded objects – with their trains of kindred images and sound behind them – sometimes have, or can have, a train that contains the whole world.' (Spoerri, 1995: 149). As such Spoerri's *Anecdoted Topography* is extended metaphorically refer to not only to the actual objects traced. The trace marks are an index to the actual object, and the actual objects referred to take on a narrative function that speaks about their connotations to the world at large, especially their relationship with their user.

The strategies employed by the artists discussed in this chapter provide a framework for many contemporary artists who engage with the everyday. A reading of the abstract work of

11 As well as having close ties with Fluxus, Spoerri was also one of the original members that signed the New Realist manifesto. The New Realists was formed in Paris on 27 October 1960 on the basis of a manifesto written by art critic Pierre Restany. Restany focused on artists who drew inspiration from consumer culture and from the idea of the readymade. The original members were Yves Klein, Arman, Daniel Spoerri and Jean Tinguely. Their aim was to overcome the so-called 'gap between art and life' by dealing directly with reality as experienced in the world of modern consumption and mass media. Some of their practices involved action-spectacle, decollage and assemblage. Restany stated that 'All of these initiatives abolish the excessive distance created by categorical understanding between general, objective contingency and urgent individual expression' (Restany, 2003: 724).

Pollock, Twombly, Fontana and Shimamoto as an aftermath of bodily gestures signals the movement away from the autonomous art object and hints at future art movements that focus on artworks that bear imprints of prior activities

Rauschenberg 'opened up' the artwork to contain the unnoticed elements of the everyday and Fluxus artists continued this philosophy but also brought the quotidian object to the forefront. They drew attention to everyday modes of experience as well as our relationship to the material culture. As such artists such as Manzoni, Knowles and Spoerri provide important references to contemporary artists' who show a concern with the quotidian object, as well as its relationship with the subject.

Chapter 2: Archaeology and art

In the variety of contemporary art practices that engage with the everyday one often sees the appearance of the body, not as the subject but as an absent instrument. The body is made visible in the work of art through traces, documents and objects that register the physical presence of the artist (Buskirk, 2005). Like Pollock and the Action painters these artists show a concern with mark making. Unlike the Action painters, their concern is not with mark making on the pictorial surface, but rather the marks and traces that we leave behind in our everyday life. Like the Happening and Fluxus artists, activities and objects of everyday life are reframed as worthy of attention and ontological study. The concern with mark making as trace is best described in light of Alfred Gell's argument that a person's identity is not only located within the mind. In *Art and Agency*, Gell argues that the location of identity should also be considered in terms of a spread of biographical events and memories. These events are dispersed across material objects, traces and leavings which could

be attributed to a specific individual. Accordingly the person is 'understood as the sum total of the indexes which testify, in life and subsequently, to the biographical existence' of that individual (1998: 222).

This chapter investigates artists, who consider, as well as question, the ability of material objects, trace and leavings as being able to testify to the biographical existence of their subject matter (themselves or other). I argue that their art practices engage with a new kind of artistic archaeology.

2.1. One's own anthropology

Within contemporary art practices there are many artists for whom collecting is a central part of their process. These artists often deal with taxonomies and systems of classification to critique activities within museums and collecting institutions. Alternatively, another form of collection-art has come to the fore in which the critique of the museum (although still considered) has been

extended to reflect narratives of the everyday and the personal. These practices highlight the unconsidered everyday objects of society and recast them as personally significant. In her essay 'Dialectic: the deceptive play of the individual or in the archive' Conkleton describes this turn as follows:

The critique of the authority offered by culture and its institutions that was implicit in these investigations has given way to a newly – and differently – conceived and practical use of the archive. The archive has been emptied of given meaning by artists ... while they co-opt the forms of the archive and its institutional practices, the context of the work is no longer an examination of cultural meanings, but a particular expression – even more than an investigation – of individuality and creativity (1998: 125).

The reconciliation between artists and the museum is evident in the manner in which artists place an emphasis on their personal narratives, rather than on the master narratives of the museum institution. In other words, these artists adopt the museum methodologies for their own pursuit of recontextualising the everyday object (Berry, 2005: 29).

In *L'Infra-ordinaire*, author Georges Perec attempts a description of what he calls the infra-ordinary, by

focusing on details of everyday life which are not normally deemed worthy of attention. He asks: 'what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual, how can we give some account of it, how can we interrogate and describe it?' He suggests as a solution the founding of one's 'own anthropology ... which will help us find in ourselves that which we have always stolen from others. Not the exotic, but the endotic'¹² (Perec, 1989: 11–12).

Perec's suggestion to create one's 'own anthropology' is realised in early work by Christian Boltanski. These works can be classified as collection-art that is concerned with the souvenir collection. The souvenir collection is a wholly personal collection comprised of samples from the past which are nostalgic and memorable (Pearce, 1994: 195). Although the souvenir is removed from its context, the value lies in its ability to authenticate memory so that the object's context is re-considered through narrative (Stewart, 1998: 150).

In *Reference Vitrines* (Figure 12) Boltanski portrays photographs and tool-like objects that resemble

¹² Perec uses the term 'endotic' as an antonym for the exotic.

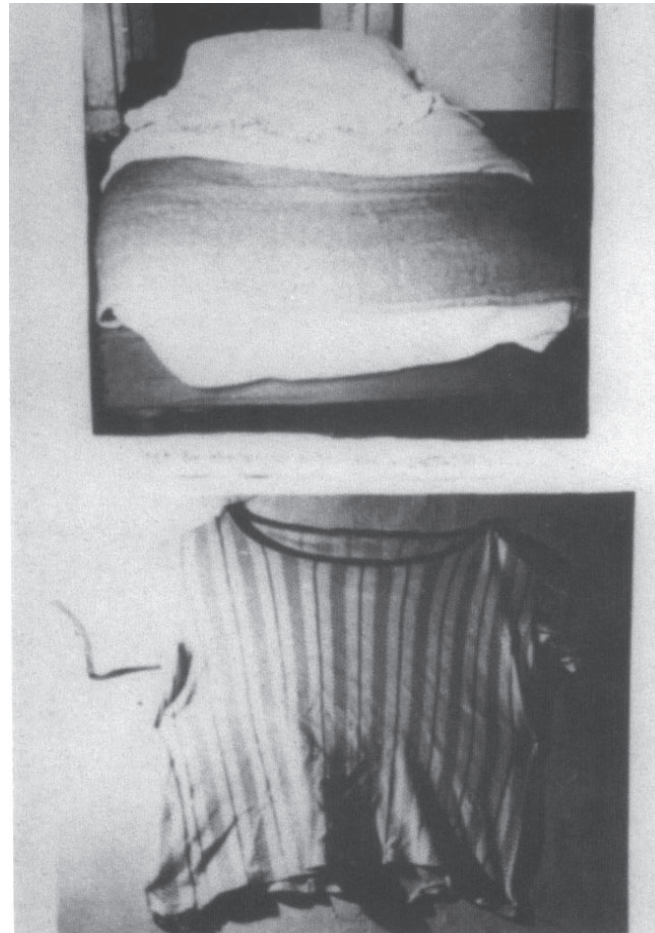


Figure 13: Christian Boltanski, *Christian Boltanski's Shirt March 1949* and *Christian Boltanski's Bed 1947–50, Search for and Presentation of Everything Remaining from my Childhood 1944–50*, (detail), 1969. Photocopied book of nine pages, 26.5 x 17.5 cm.

that provides an aesthetic understanding of the past. These objects are often accompanied by text to further an understanding of the context of the objects (DeRoo, 2004: 228). In the context of Boltanski's reconstructions these textual explanations often becomes obscure. Boltanski dated his recollected objects with a precision that is usually reserved for historical events (in, for example, *Christian Boltanski's Shirt March 1949*), but the quotidian nature of the objects brings into question whether such a precise dating is possible or even relevant (DeRoo, 2004: 229).

Furthermore ethnographical display usually concerns itself with objects that relate to a collective history of the past. By framing objects that relate to an individual within this context the process of subtracting meaning from it becomes even more difficult. Boltanski confuses us further by admitting that most of these archives are, in fact, fake. He was not able to find anything from his childhood and collected objects from his nephew that resembled the things that he possessed. We are made aware of the unreliability of the artist's statement and the uncertain value

of his archival collections. The uncertain nature of these exhibits question the whole idea of the preservation of the past (Ruchel-Stockmans, 2006).

Boltanski also attempted to reconstruct his childhood in his work *Reconstruction of Everything Belonging to Christian Boltanski 1948–1954*. However, this time he relied on the memory of objects rather than on the objects themselves. He used plasticine to make models of toys and clothing. The objects are fragile and speak of the possibility of decay. Boltanski not only exhibited these objects but also photographed them and published them in book form. In *Fury of Disappearance, Christian Boltanski's Archives of Forgetting* Asmann argues that this act can be described as the recording of something evanescent, that he is in fact 'photographing the past' (2006: 89). This action becomes a tool against forgetting.

Boltanski's use of memories of his everyday is contradictory. He expresses his wish to preserve everything from his past but leaves us with deceptive self-representations. He tells us that the aim of such a project is to be assured of never

dying, but the way in which he exhibit his memory objects hints that he is already dead.

2.2. Trace and the absent body

How do 'inanimate' objects come to be socially active? How can an object signal, or be something beyond itself? One way for this to happen is for an ordinary object to become a numinous object. A numinous object is one that has acquired a perceived significance through its associations. It is collected and preserved not for what it reveals as a material document, but for its association with a person or place (Glynn and Maines, 1993: 10). Within their art practice, artists often reframe an object as numinous by placing an emphasis on the trace that an individual left behind on it.

One such example is the work by Cornelia Parker, who chose well-known historical figures as subjects for her work. Her subjects include Freud, Hitler, Turner and Einstein. Within these works ordinary things, or traces from ordinary objects, evoke the historical figures to whom they belonged.

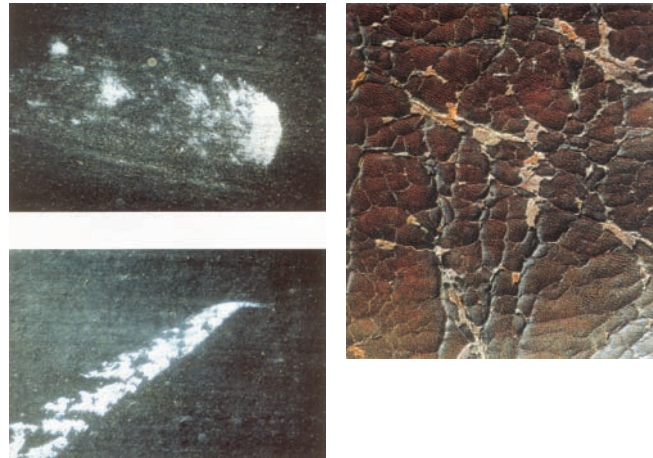


Figure 14 (left): Cornelia Parker, *Einstein's Abstracts*, 1999. Cibachromes on aluminium and photomicrographs.

Figure 15 (right): Cornelia Parker, *Marks Made by Freud, Subconsciously*, 2000. Macrophotograph.

For *Einstein's Abstracts* (Figure 14) Parker tracked down a blackboard used by Alfred Einstein in 1915. The board was wiped, but traces of the equations were still visible on the surface. Parker took photographs through a microscope of these traces of chalk left behind. The resulting images are cosmic in nature. They evoke streaking stars rather than mathematical equations.

In *Marks Made by Freud, Subconsciously* (Figure 15) Parker was again more interested in the trace that Freud left behind on a chair, than in the chair itself. She photographed the creases left behind as a way of evoking the presence of its owner. She explains her fascination with the relationship between object and owner as follows:

I struggle to understand Einstein, Freud, Hitler ... but somehow by looking at something really closely that they're associated with –like the creases in Freud's chair, you can sort of make a different more intuitive sense out of them, I think I know more about Einstein's theory of relativity by looking through a microscope at his equations; looking is a different kind of knowledge' (Parker, 2000: 59).

The significance of these objects thus lies in their material transformation through use. In daily life people use things up and expose them to the elements. Their social effects are visible not only in their preservation but also in the traces of their destruction. In her anthropological work on waste Mary Douglas speaks of the danger of things that have been incompletely absorbed into the category of waste. 'Rejected bits and pieces' are a threat when they are recognisably out of place, but can still be traced

back to their origins. 'This is the stage at which they are dangerous' Douglas writes, 'their half-identity still clings to them'. In the end all identity will disappear when the object has gone through a 'long process of pulverizing, dissolving and rotting away' and the 'physical thing' will enter the 'mass of common rubbish' (Douglas, 1966: 161). In part, an archaeologist's task is to recover items of value from a site before they lose all significance and become pure waste. Alternatively they reconstruct the site so that it resembles its original appearance.

Janine Antoni takes on this role of the archaeologist for her work *Beatrice Thomas* (Figure 16). The site-specific installation took place in an abandoned firehouse in Harlem.¹⁴ Antoni noticed that the adjacent building was abandoned due to arson and decay. She left the top floor of the site unaltered and instead chose to reconstruct the kitchen of an apartment in the neighbouring building. The actual site became the viewing point from which her reconstruction could be seen.

Antoni proceeded to restore the kitchen to its former state. She cleaned the rubble, stripped



Figure 16: Janine Antoni, *Beatrice Thomas*, 1996. Abandoned building, paint, drywall, linoleum, extension cord, light bulb.

the walls, restored the cupboards and provided a source of light by running an electrical line from the firehouse. The process took on aspects of an archaeological dig. After stripping layer after layer of paint she chose a new colour based on the original paint on the walls.

Whilst reconstructing the space Antoni discovered traces of the person who once lived there. These included old photographs, love letters and a social security card that allowed her to establish the

¹⁴ Beatrice Thomas was part of a joint project by Antoni, Marcel Odenbach and Nari Ward called *The 3 Legged Race*. Each artist was given a separate floor of the abandoned building to produce a site-specific installation.



Figure 17: Sophie Calle, *L'Hôtel*, (detail). 1981. Framed photography and text, 102 x 142 cm.

former tenant's identity. She attempted to locate the tenant but unfortunately, Beatrice Thomas was not to be found. However, by naming this piece after her, she became the subject of the work.

The subject does get named, but in a curious turn it serves only to emphasise her absence. Although Beatrice Thomas has been established as the tenant of the flat, her actions and location after the event of the fire is unknown and cannot be traced. The restored flat becomes a monument to a life that will remain largely unknown, and it was later left to enter the same state of decay in which the artist found it.

The ability of objects and traces to speak for their owners is also investigated by Sophie Calle through her investigation of the daily activities of strangers in *L'Hôtel* (Figure 17). As an introduction to the photographic and narrative reportage for this project she wrote,

On Monday, February 16, 1981 I was hired as a temporary chambermaid for three weeks in a Venetian hotel. I was assigned twelve bedrooms on the fourth floor. In the course of my cleaning duties, I examined the personal belongings of the hotel guests and observed through details

lives which remained unknown to me. On Friday, March 6 the job came to an end (1981: 157).

L'Hôtel was regulated by a method of scrutiny: of the personal effects of the hotel tenants; the way in which they appropriated the space; and the ways in which the spaces were used by different people. Calle documents the appropriation of the space by the different hotel tenants, noting her observations in a diary. She documents the belongings and traces that the tenants left behind in notes and black and white photography. 'There are a few clues by the washbasin: a dirty comb with missing teeth, a toothbrush, toothpaste, and Mennen deodorant ... and a list of clothes he is travelling with.' By elimination she interprets them. 'That tells me that today he is wearing blue trousers, a blue T-Shirt and a windbreaker' (1981: 159–161).

Calle went beyond the role of the interpreter of the traces by leaving her own mark on the spaces that her subjects occupy. She contributed to the traces left behind through activities such as eating leftover food, pocketing abandoned slippers or applying makeup and perfume. The familiarity of these actions does not allow her a greater

understanding of her subjects. She explains that 'I examined the personal belongings of the hotel guests and observed through details lives which remained unknown to me' (1981: 157). Michael Sheringham argues that Calle 'does not locate any kind of essence or identity above and beyond these concrete traces; on the contrary, by focusing on the traces themselves, in the absence of those who left them, she underlines both how very telling they are, and how difficult it is to pin down what they tell' (2006: 416).

These works by Parker, Antoni and Calle all seem to ask what we can learn from an absent person's everyday objects. This question is central to much investigation in material culture and archaeological studies. In art, these everyday objects can become metaphors for more than just the person who owned them. The familiar objects can trigger associations for the viewer and, as such, it is not only the personalised aspects that are considered, but also aspects of the past and its collective memory.

15 The emergence of maps in art can be traced to the collage art of the Dada and Surrealist movement. One of the first works that include a map is Hannah Höch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* in which she placed a small map in the corner of the collage. The map highlights the European countries where women were allowed to vote, with a small photograph of Höch's face pasted to the side. (Wood 2010: 194). A number of artists included maps in their work at roughly the same time (Haussmann in *ABCD* (1923–1924); Man Ray in *Transatlantique* (1921), and Kurt Schwitters in *The Holy Saddlers Portfolio* (1922) to name a few). The trend continued within the Surrealist movement with works such as *The Surrealist Map of the World* (1929), which Wood credits to Paul Éluard, and Max Ernst's relief, *Europe After the Rain I*. Wood labels these maps as counter-maps, maps that are made against other maps

2.3. The map as artefact of human behaviour

Jim Blaut argues that the mapping impulse is innately human. In *Natural Mapping* he argues for a theory of mapping that views maps as artefacts of human environmental behaviour. When a representation 'projects through scale to refer to a place' it becomes a map. Natural mapping forms landscape-like representations without atomising the features as would happen in map legends. The representation system is much more flexible (Blaut, 1991).

Dennis Wood argues that the most important characteristic of a mapping system is how it links it reader to the world it embodies. In a conventional system it usually functions as more of a description of the territory one inhabits, rather than one's behaviour within that territory (Wood, 2010: 81). Among the countless examples of artists that use maps to parody instruments of power and authority there is a branch of map art that breaks down the standardisation of conventional cartography or lend a personalised quality to them.¹⁵ One such example is the mapping processes of



Figure 18: On Kawara, *I Went*, (Detail). 1968–1979. Binders, ink on printed paper, and plastic sleeves. Each binder: 29.9 x 29.5 x 7.6 cm.

On Kawara who documents aspects of his life in an extremely thorough and obsessive manner. He began his *I Went* series (Figure 18) on 1 June, 1968 and ended it twelve years later on 17 September, 1979. Kawara traced his daily movements with a red pen onto a photocopy of a black and white street map. The series was eventually published in twelve volumes, each volume representing one year. The published form of the series enables people to view it in its entirety. In effect, when one is paging through each volume, one is able to unroll a timeline of these twelve years of Kawara's life.¹⁶

Vera Kotaji likens the red track marks of Kawara's movement with the cracks in pre-existing fractures of cave walls filled with prehistoric art. She also argues that the photocopied maps bear a visual closeness to ancient engravings (Kotaji, 2007). Kawara's process in his *I Went* series also bears a striking resemblance to a sociological study published in 1952 by PH Chombart de Lauwe. De Lauwe found that the best way to document physical milieu, as well as social processes, was through an aerial survey. One of his maps showed 'all the journeys made in one year by a

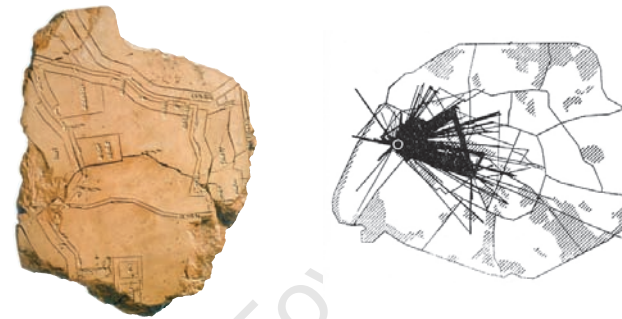


Figure 19 (left): Neo-Sumerian temple plan on clay tablet, circa 2100 bc.

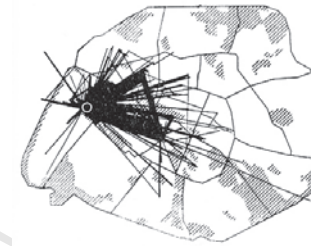


Figure 20 (right): Chombart De Lauwe, Map plotting routes of student inhabiting 16th Arrondissement, 1952.

student living in the 16th Arrondissement' (Figure 20). The map is dominated by a thick triangle that shows his route between his dormitory, piano lessons and lecture rooms (Wollen, 1999: 35).

I Read led to a further work called the *Today Series* (often referred to as *Date Paintings*) (Figure 21). Kawara painted his first date painting on 4 January, 1966. Since then he has painted close to 2,000 of these works. Each painting has to be completed on a single day. It consists of the date painstakingly painted on canvas and an extract from the day's

to question the power relations embedded within them (Wood, 2010: 199).

¹⁶ The volumes are often exhibited accompanied by other inventories in notebooks like *I Met* and *I Read*. These are respectively a record of everyone that he spoke to on a particular day and newspaper clippings that he found interesting, stamped with the date on which he read them.



Figure 21: On Kawara, *Mar.20, 1974, 1974*, from the *Today Series*, 1966. Liquitex on canvas, cardboard box, newspaper, 25.5 x 33 cm.

newspaper stored with it (Rorimer, 1991: 122).

The paintings offer a clue as to where Kawara found himself at that particular time, as he would translate the date into the local language. For a time Kawara added a subtitle to each painting. These subtitles often juxtaposed the historical, or the 'newsworthy' with the everyday. An example is 11 March, 1966 when Kawara writes 'The killer of Wendy Sue Wolin, 7, is still hiding somewhere'. Two days later he follows with 'Ay-O brought his cat to my apartment' (Kawara. 1996. Subtitles of the *Date Paintings* made that month).

When viewing *Date Paintings* together with their subtitle Weideman argues that the spectator will always experience 'Today' as 'Yesterday' (Weideman in Chiong, 1999: 56). Watkins takes this further by referring to the *Date Paintings* as 'gravestones, memorials for the time it took to make them.' He argues that they make sense in a similar way to graffiti, saying 'I was here' in the past tense and leaving only a trace of a 'here/now-ness' to be encountered by someone else (Watkins, 2002: 87). Many of Kawara's works refer directly to the passing of time. His *Today Series* is an obvious



Figure 22: Daniel Belasco Rogers, *Seven year drawing Berlin, 2003–2009*.

example, but it is especially in *100 Year Calendar (18 864 days)*, *One Million Years (Past)* and *One Million Years (Future)* that we become acutely aware of both the continuous nature of time and the transience of existence. In *100 Year Calendar* Kawara marks the days on which he produced his *Date Paintings* as well as marking the time that has passed since he was born (up to the day it was first exhibited). Jonathan Watkins notes that 'as he counts up the days he is acutely aware of the fact that he is simultaneously counting them down' (Watkins, 2002: 87). If one takes into account that Kawara's work since

his first *Date Painting* on 4 January, 1966 has dealt with his own actions, it could be argued that it is a type of visual autobiography. Lucy Lippard remarks that this kind of autobiography is 'a kind of self-assurance that the artist does, in fact, exist' (Lippard, 1997: 50). Simultaneously the manner in which Kawara refers to the passing of time in an almost tangible manner leaves us little doubt that he is aware of his own finite lifespan.

Daniel Belasco Rogers also narrates his life through the personal cartographic tracings of his movements (Figure 22). He does so by carrying a GPS with him everywhere he goes and by plotting his movements over the course of different time periods and places. These works originated out in his interest in the body as a drawing tool. He was interested in knowing what a drawing of his life would look like. He says that he has 'made this practice part of [his] everyday life through action, the tool of the performance artist ... it is the framing of a certain sort of consciousness about my everyday life around an act that I already practice' (Rogers, 2004: 1).

Chapter 3: Methodology

43

3.1. An archaeology of self

The idea that my everyday actions can be seen as performances that are reframed and solidified within my art practice is an important element of my work. I intend my body of work to be read as evidence of my actions and interactions with the world and with material culture. Thus my work is based on the idea that the 'background noise' of everyday life can be reframed as art. Not through theatricality, but simply by isolating aspects of everyday life and transfiguring it as art.

My method entails collecting documents, objects, actions and routines from my life. It is not an attempt to archive my collection in its real form but rather to give materiality to it by various art processes. My goal is to create a more permanent record of everyday actions and routines. I often use material traces of past actions that can no longer be understood through their direct experience but only through memory. The

everyday as a conscious experience is therefore traced in a fragmented and investigatory manner.

Time passes and patterns are repeated. These patterns and rituals are used as comfort mechanisms and repositories of meaning. My method entails the searching for self through the intimate discovery and physical presence in the world. It provides clues of personal memory accessed through objects and moments, but the personal meaning located in the rituals of the everyday is not revealed to the viewer. It reveals emptiness and this attempt at memorialisation is likely to fail. I try to create a shared history that the viewer is invited to partake in.

The awareness of my own mortality is echoed in the work but remains rather obscure. The act of collecting, documenting and elevating the everyday into a new context is structured

according to a chosen time frame. The passing of time serves as the link to the investigation and points to the fragility of life and inevitable proof of the passing of one's own time. The work serves as affirmation of the day to come and the day that has already been. It serves as memory, a reminder of what has happened; and evidence of my day to day experiences and my existence.

3.2. Indexical methods

The title of this dissertation, *An Archaeology of Self*, refers to my method of collecting the traces of everyday existence that I leave behind. My creative work is an attempt to provide materiality to the often ephemeral detritus, actions and objects. I use digital image capturing, digital fabrication, as well as traditional sculptural processes to achieve this. The collected documents, objects and photographs, in their initial form, serve as indices to the action performed by myself. The processes I use to create the artworks can also be described as indexical in nature. The use of a flatbed scanner allows for the scanning of documents as well as 3-dimensional objects with limited depth. The scanner creates an image

in memory which can then be printed or stored digitally. Within archival processes documents are scanned to provide a lasting digital record.¹⁷

The scanning process is comparable with digital photography. Susan Sontag wrote that a photograph is 'not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real: it is also a trace, something directly stencilled of the real, like a footprint or a death mask¹⁸' (Sontag, 1990: 154). Krauss also states that photographs exhibit 'ghostly traces of departed objects; they look like footprints in sand, or marks that have been left in dust' (Krauss, 1977a: 75). With the advent of digital photography the photographs' status as an indexical object has been questioned. This is because a photograph can now be manipulated and changed. The indexical link to the referent can be constructed or obscured. My own use of the scanning process is not objective. I sharpen and crop the scanned image and change the scale of the original significantly. My motivation, however, is not to create a 'traceless, digital sign', but rather to enhance the visibility and appearance of the trace elements through defamiliarisation. Another technique employed relates to digital

17 The large format scanner that was used is the only one of its type in South Africa. The same scanner is used by the Vatican Secret Archives.

18 A death mask is a cast from a mould taken from a recently deceased individual.

fabrication with a laser cutter. This process allows me to turn 2-dimensional documents or photographs into 3-dimensional objects. The original material is scanned in, or photographed. Turning the digital image into a bitmap allows the laser cutter to trace the photographic or textual elements as if they were a map. The term bitmap refers to 'map of bits or pixels'. The elements in the image are spatially mapped according to the location of the pixels.

In the case of *Dead Chronicles* and *In the Kitchen with a Teacup* the cut engravings are used as is. The tracing and recording of habit and routine are echoed in the process of engraving (tracing with the laser).

For the production of *Fossils* and *Mound*, the negative spaces around the original text are engraved into perspex. The text itself is therefore raised, gaining 3-dimensionality from which moulds are taken.

Richard Shone argues that 'a cast of an object traps it in time ... displaying ... its own past and the past of the object it replicates' (Shone, 1995: 52). He continues by likening it to a death mask.

Similarly to Susan Sontag's comparison of a photograph to a death mask, Shone argues that a cast is a tangible reminder of a particular space or object which forms a connection to the past. The indexical nature of the cast destabilises the opposition between presence and absence. The original is removed and the cast remains as a mark of its absence (Cvoro, 2002: 57). The play between presence and absence becomes even more obscure because of the layering of indexical methods in production. The original objects have gone through a process of scanning, engraving and casting. After each process the materiality of the original document is enhanced.

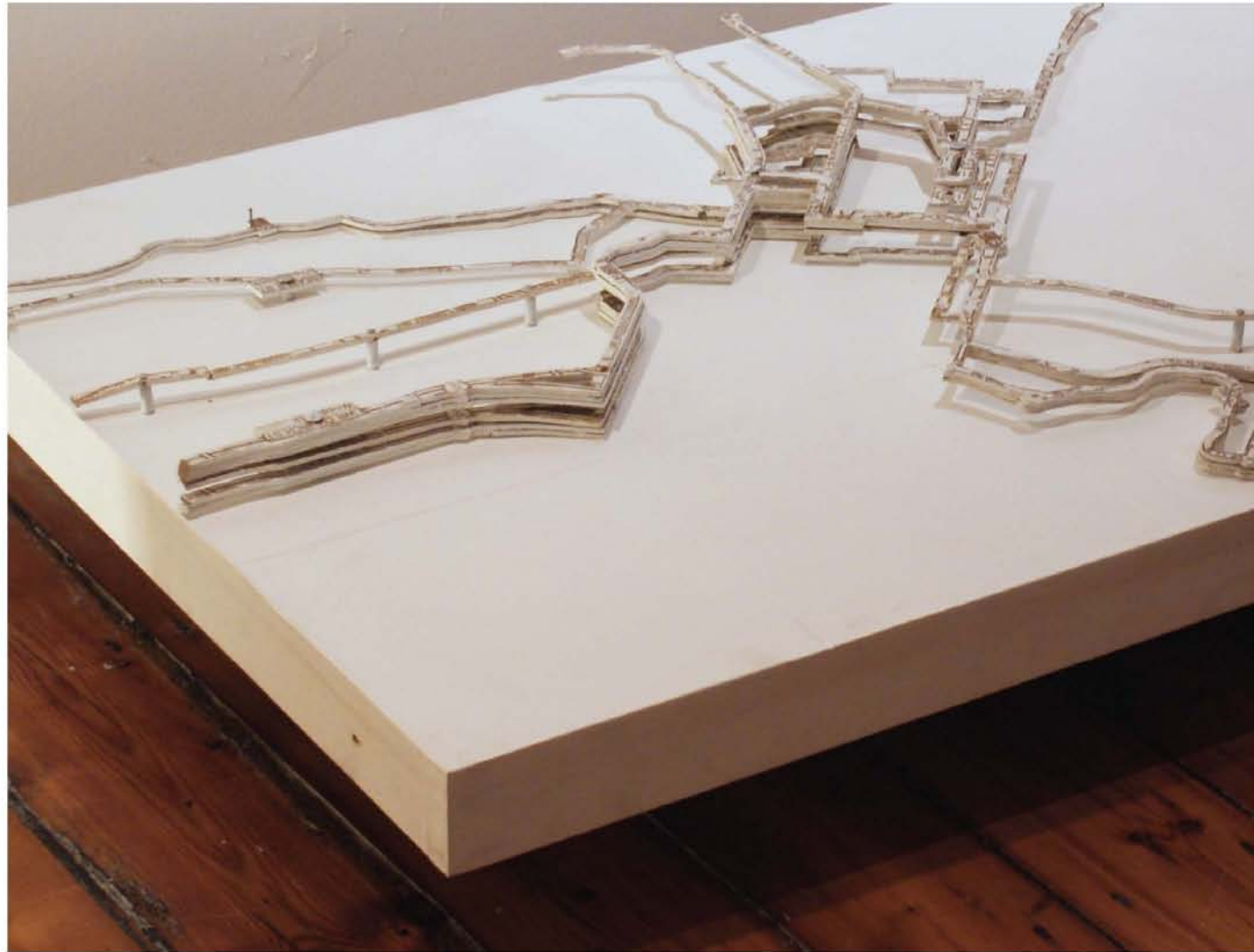


Figure 23: *Dead Chronicles*, (detail), 2008–2010. Masonite.

Chapter 4: **Notes on the artworks**

4.1. Dead Chronicles: January – December

This work tracks my movement of the previous year by consulting debit card bank records. It entailed a slow process of locating shop after shop and the most logical route followed. It became a process of memory lost, as well as found. Often I could not make sense of where the records had led me. Other times I remembered the exact day, purchases made, and conversations that I had had. I discovered that I only left the greater Cape Town area twice to visit a holiday house in Kleinmond. Furthermore it became obvious that I followed the same routes and went to the same shops day after day and month after month.

Dead Chronicles represents actions and routines that took place over the course of several months. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines a chronicle firstly as a 'detailed and continuous register of events in order of time' and secondly



Figure 24: *Dead Chronicles*, (detail), 2008–2010.
Masonite.

as a 'historical record'. The genre of chronicles is further divided into two subgroups. A live chronicle refers to the recording of events in a regular fashion shortly after they occur, while a dead chronicle lists events up to the time of writing, but does not add further events as they occur. I traced my movements within a specific time period even though the same routines presented themselves again. Therefore it is a continuous but limited visual register of my movements as reflected by my debit card records.

Although *Dead Chronicles* is tangible evidence of personal routine it does lend itself to being read as a historical record. This is because it also becomes part of a shared history. It tracks my movement through a spider web of streets that are familiar to anyone that frequents Cape Town. I have witnessed people searching for the location of their houses as well as the sites of their graffiti art within the work, thus my routine and actions forms part of a collective history. By opposing the divide between my everyday and history, I attempt to make a more

lasting record of my life. *Dead Chronicles* gives tangible form and evidence to a particular and personal history of routine, however, it remains coded and the personal memory lost and found is contained and never revealed to the viewer.



Figure 25: *Fossil*, 2009. Resin.

4.2. Fossils: September – March

On 25 March 2009 I emptied my handbag and collected all the till slips that had accumulated as far back as September 2008. The value of a till slip is short lived. We collect them as proof of expenditure, possibly for tax return purposes or paste them in an invoice book where the possibility of a second cursory glance is minimal. At the same time I know that I am not alone in my habit of letting them pile up in my wallet and side pockets of my handbag. When things start to get out of control I take them out, but instead of discarding them I tend to stuff them somewhere inside a drawer or at the back of a closet. Eventually, when spring cleaning, I will throw them away without a second thought. The till slips in their original form have passed their short time span of importance, however, they do provide material evidence of the act of purchasing and acquiring. They are part of the 'background noise' of my everyday actions.

Each *Fossil* was made by digitally capturing the original till slip and engraving the

text and paper fold marks into a perspex sheet from which a mould was taken. Finally each mould was cast with resin.

By turning them into something that resembles fossils I attempted to reconstruct them into indexical objects. I am aware of the fact that they function on two levels. By making a more permanent record of them I see them as my attempt at survival, but by removing them from their context and reframing them within an ethnographic methodology I also question the ability to be successful in such a pursuit.

Fossils functions through estrangement. Through the casting process the text on the till slips are raised and textured. They are recognised as till slips but have a strange and unfamiliar quality.



Figure 26: *Mound*, 2010. Resin.



Figure 27: *Mound*, (detail), 2010. Resin.

4.3. Mound: April – August

Mound is an extension of the production processes followed with *Fossils*. Instead of till slips, a bill that came through the post is used as the original document. The title *Mound* refers to a collection of objects that is laid on top of each other. A further connection can be established to a burial mound, a heap of earth that is placed over a tomb (*Oxford Dictionary Online*). It alludes to the purchasing of the objects as represented in the bill, as well as to a geographical site that can be explored or excavated.



Figure 28: *Sleep: Tuesday*, 2010. Resin.

4.4. Sleep: Monday to Sunday

Each morning for one week I documented the shape my pillow was in after I woke up. I attempted to reconstruct these shapes with a pillow bought especially for the purpose. The trace of my body that would usually only last for a short period, was then fixed permanently through a casting process. Each pillow is tagged with the day of the week on which the shape was documented. I treated, washed and bleached each cast to represent the using and cleaning of my actual pillows. The casts retain the folds and shape of original, but the objects are made useless by their solidified material form.

Monday – Sunday provides the act of sleeping with material form. At the same time I attempt to create an opposition to the fossilised form by indicating the passage of time.



Figure 29: *Solescape Part 1*, 2010. Digital Print.

4.5. Solescapes (series)

Solescapes reveal the trace of my actions and movements, left on objects through its forced contact with the environment. Each image shows the wear of a favourite pairs of shoes.

An image of each sole was recorded by rubbing it with charcoal, covering it with wet paper and then lifting the charcoal dust through rubbing and embossing. The prints were then scanned in, cropped and enlarged. The soles are recast as landscapes where on human interference is visible.



Figure 30: *Archive (Richard)*, 2010. Digital Print.

4.6. Archives (series)

Archives refer to people, that through the relationship that I had with them, have left a lasting trace on my life. It takes the form of four digital prints. Individually they are named *Archive (Danie)*, *Archive (Richard)*, *Archive (June)* and *Archive (Joan)*. Each of these works was made by wetting and scrunching up correspondence that were sent or given to me by these persons. The paper balls were scanned in, enlarged and printed onto watercolour paper.

The content of the correspondence is kept hidden. The private nature of the subject matter is further indicated through using an archival diasec mounting process¹⁹. The result is a high gloss image that counters the material quality of the print, as well as emphasise its inaccessibility.

19 Diasec prints are mounted onto an aluminum panel and laminated with Plexiglas.

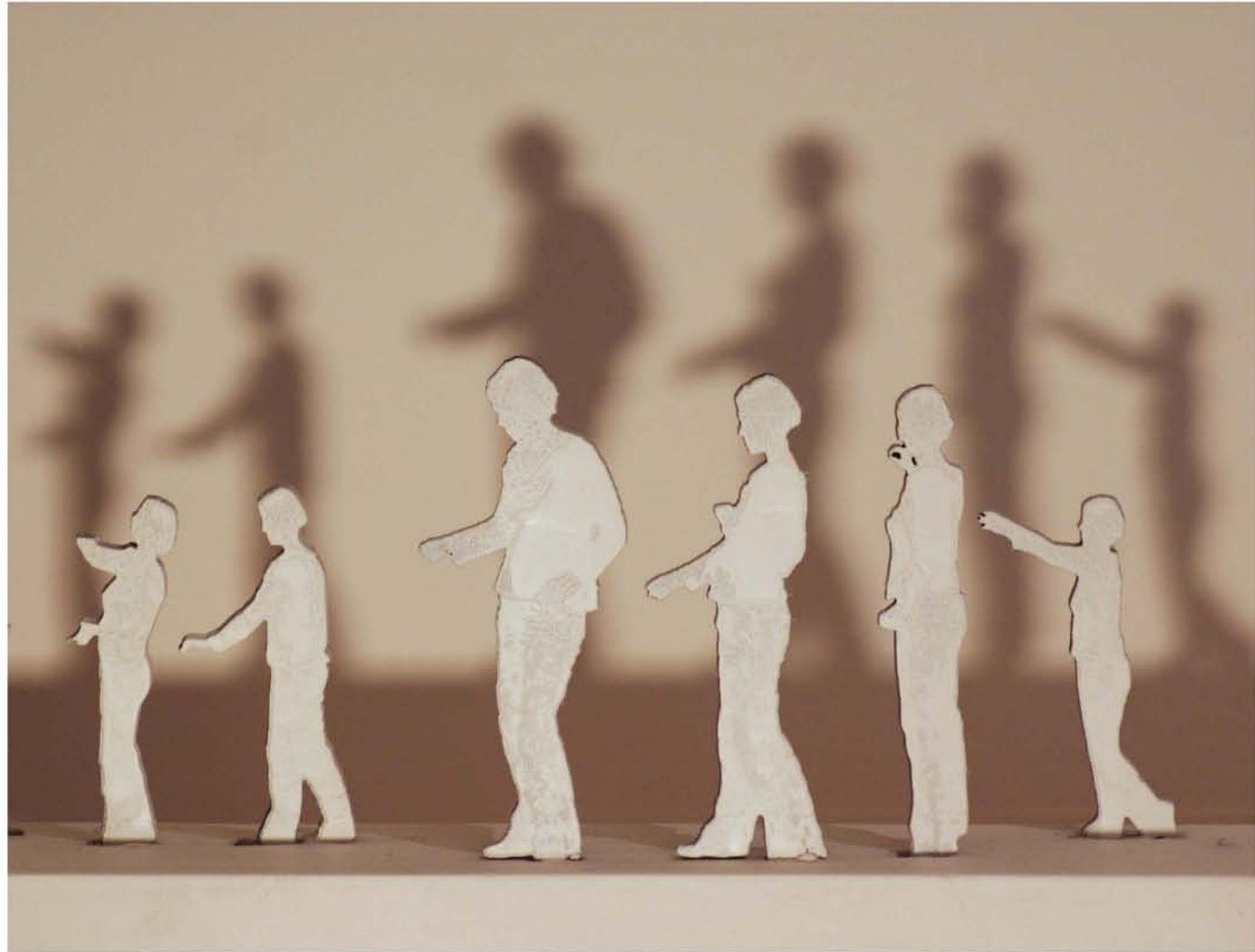


Figure 31: *In the Kitchen, with a Teacup*, 2008–2009. Masonite and plywood.

4.7. In the Kitchen, with a Teacup

In the Kitchen, with a Teacup was made by documenting the everyday act of making a cup of tea with a 5 second interval stop frame photographic method. The images were then scanned in and isolated from their background. After each figure was converted to a bitmap, it was engraved into masonite and mounted onto plywood. These silhouettes of the original action are mounted so that their shadows come into play.

The everyday routine of making a cup of tea is recast as worthy of attention. At the same time the mechanical action of daily routines are emphasised by the repetition of the silhouettes within the cast shadows.

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Figure 24: Ryna Cilliers, *Dead Chronicles*, (detail), 2008–2010. Masonite.

Figure 25: Ryna Cilliers, *Fossil*, 2009. Resin.

Figure 26: Ryna Cilliers, *Mound*, 2010. Resin.

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Figure 28: Ryna Cilliers, *Sleep: Tuesday*, 2010. Resin.

Figure 29: Ryna Cilliers, *Solescape Part 1*, 2010. Digital Print.

Figure 30: Ryna Cilliers, *Archive (Richard)*, 2010. Digital Print.

Figure 31: Ryna Cilliers, *In the Kitchen, with a Teacup*, 2008–2009. Masonite and plywood.